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JOSEPH RICHMOND CHURCHILL

CLARENCE HINCKLEY KNOWLTON

(With Photographs)

At the time of its organization, December 10, 1895, the New England Botanical Club was especially fortunate in securing as charter members a substantial and active group of amateurs, as well as the professional botanists of the period. George E. Davenport, Edward L. Rand, Walter Deane, Honorable Joseph R. Churchill, Frank S. Collins, Nathaniel T. Kidder, Dr. George G. Kennedy, Emile F. Williams, Edwin Faxon and Charles E. Faxon, and Lorin L. Dame; these were a group of business and professional men deeply interested in botany as an avocation. Such men would have brought strength to any organization. Most of them lived for many years to share in the interests of the Club and to promote its welfare.

It is to commemorate the life and interests of one of these men that this biographical sketch has been prepared. Joseph Richmond Churchill was born in Dorchester, Massachusetts, July 29, 1845. He was the son of Asaph Churchill, lawyer and banker, descendant of an old Plymouth family. His school life was uneventful. As a youth he became an ardent collector of insects, and devoted much of his leisure to that fascinating pursuit. Entering Harvard College, he received his A.B. degree in 1867. Science was beginning to receive some attention at Harvard, and during the latter part of his course young Churchill studied botany under Asa Gray.

An old book on student life in the college of those days says: "If a man had any accomplishment to perfect, or any fancy to please,



the Junior year used to be the time in which of all others he could carry out his plans. . . . If one falls in with a pair of students miles away from Cambridge, tramping through woods and over fields, collecting specimens of plants or minerals or insects, they are sure to be Juniors—complacent, dignified, happy Juniors. At least, it used to be so in those days.” I like to think of young Churchill as such an energetic Junior.

After finishing the Law School course at Harvard in 1869, the young man was admitted to the bar and began the practice of law in partnership with his father, in Boston. On January 9, 1871, Governor Claflin appointed the young lawyer a justice of the Municipal Court, Dorchester District of Boston. Some comment was made at the time on account of the youth of the new Judge, but Judge Churchill assured his critics that he would endeavor to surmount that difficulty, and he did so successfully, serving for sixty consecutive years, and retiring on the anniversary of his appointment. Dorchester was a quiet New England suburb in those days, with a population of 12,000 people, but at the time of his retirement it had a population of 187,000, with all the complicated problems of modern urban life. The Judge grew with his position, and administered his office with unsurpassed dignity.

The appointment made it possible for Judge Churchill to marry. He had become engaged to Mary Cushing, daughter of Dr. Benjamin Cushing of Dorchester, and the wedding took place on February 21, 1871, soon after the appointment. Dr. Cushing built a house for the young people beside his own, on Meetinghouse Hill in Dorchester, and they made it their lifelong home. Three children were born to them, one of whom survives the Judge, Dr. Anna Q. Churchill, who is Professor of Microscopical Anatomy at Tufts College Medical and Dental School.

As his private legal practice Judge Churchill specialized in mortgages, and became a recognized expert. He idealized the mortgage as a means of grace for the mortgagor working for a home of his own, and as the best possible investment for the conservative investor. When the Massachusetts Coöperative Bank was organized in Dorchester he became its first president, and held the office for the rest of his life, more than 25 years. He also held the first shares ever issued by the bank.

Although Churchill studied botany at Harvard under Asa Gray,



he did not begin an herbarium at that time. In 1869, after explaining the relationship between columbine and buttercup to his interested fiancée, he began his collection by pressing both plants. About five hundred species were analyzed by the young couple during their engagement. Like many other amateurs, Judge Churchill began to mount his specimens on small sheets till he had about a hundred of them, some of which are still in existence. The oldest of these is *Oxalis Acetosella* from Campobello, in 1867. Then, after consultation at the Gray Herbarium, he adopted the standard size recommended by botanists there. He aimed to collect everything with his own hands, and did not care for exchanges. His idea was to go to the place where the flower grew and collect it there himself. In this way he built up an herbarium of 13,313 sheets, 146 of which were collected in 1932, the 87th year of his life. The Judge was very particular about the quality of his specimens. He collected them with great care, and spent many happy hours in putting them into press, and in straightening out leaves and petals.

The ultimate aim of this ardent collector was to collect with his own hands every species and variety listed in the area covered by Gray's Manual, but he often made excursions into outlying territory. The first real collecting trip away from home was in 1873 to find the saxifrages near Willoughby Lake in northern Vermont, where many inconveniences were suffered by the young couple in their primitive quarters. In fact, Mrs. Churchill often said that their vacations were always planned with some botanical objective, and often took them far from the comforts of home and of good hotels.

The island of Nantucket was a favorite place, visited again and again with most pleasing results. Berkshire County also attracted him early, and he first explored the fascinating region around Williamstown and Mt. Greylock. Later vacations took him to Lanesboro, near the center, and to Sheffield in the southern part of the county. But best of all places in Massachusetts he loved the Blue Hills where he had roamed as a boy, and they never failed to interest him. Two delightful summers were spent with his friend Charles Francis Jenney, Federal Judge, ornithologist and botanist, on the island of Monhegan, off the Maine coast.

Outside of his own state he liked Virginia best, and made many visits there, often in the spring. He loved especially the region around Norfolk, for in addition to botanical attractions at Virginia Beach



and elsewhere it was easy for him to visit Hampton Institute and listen to the negro spirituals as sung by the students there. This music held a peculiar charm for him. He also botanized much in Richmond and along the James River, at Lexington, the Natural Bridge and elsewhere in the Old Dominion. Insects and poison ivy disturbed him not, and a hot summer day held no terrors for him. Once at Kingston, Jamaica, when even the negroes were carrying parasols to protect them from the sun, he walked down the street in the early afternoon, and on his return remarked, "This is the only time I have ever been really warm enough."

The regions at Baltimore, Maryland and Rehoboth, Delaware, of Tryon and Wilmington, North Carolina, Beaufort, South Carolina, Lookout Mt., Tennessee, Jacksonville and Tampa, Florida, were other southern places visited and explored.

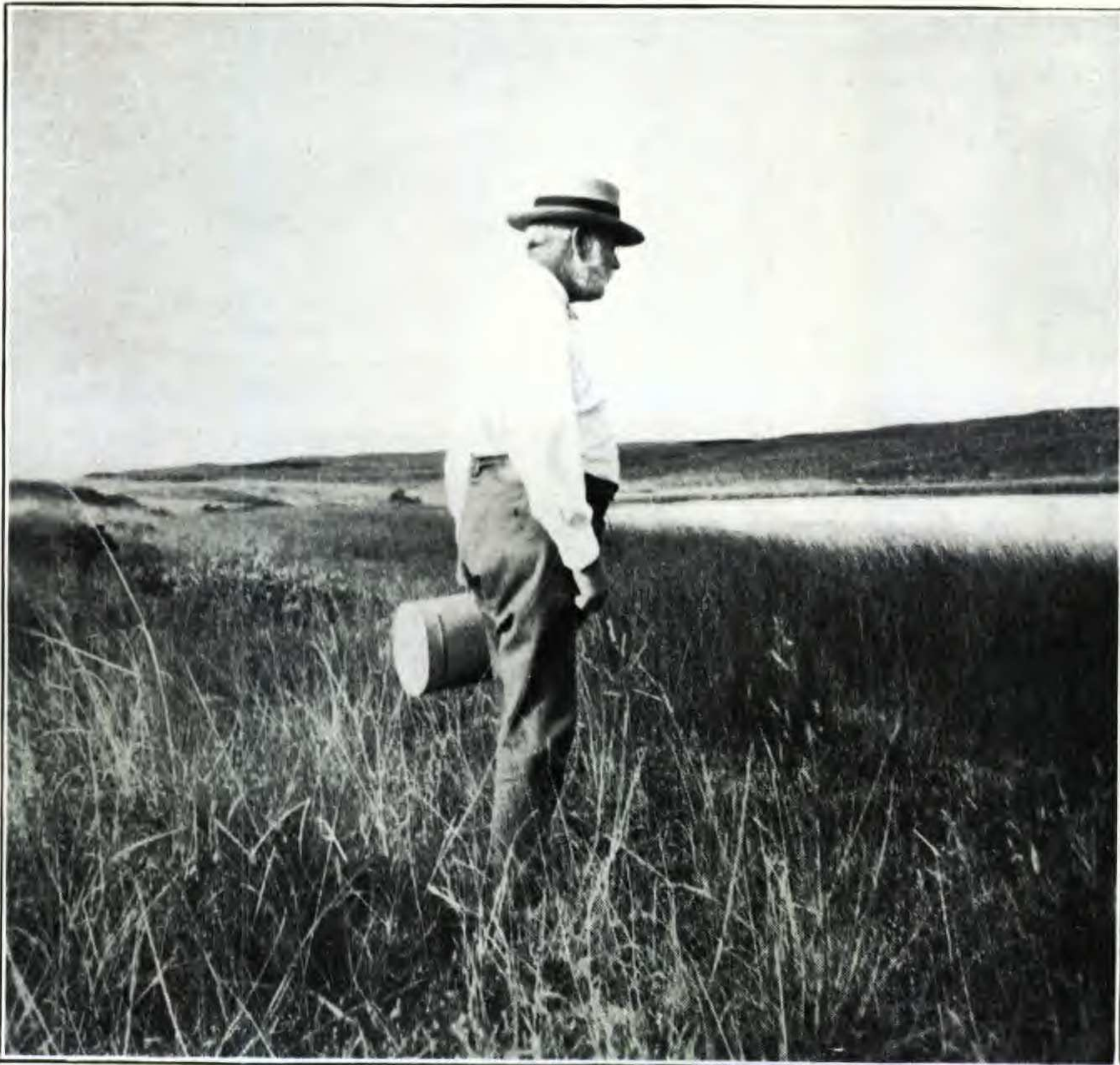
"No Trespassing" signs were no deterrent to the Judge's botanical activities, but on one of his last visits to the Chicago region he was much hampered by the walls and fences which accompanied these signs. It was not till he had transferred himself to Lake Maxinkuckee in Indiana that he was satisfied with the conditions for collecting. One noteworthy visit to St. Louis in early summer was especially delightful. Dr. Jesse M. Greenman of the Missouri Botanical Garden arranged numerous botanical excursions which proved most satisfactory. The Judge's long friendship with Dr. Greenman had much influence with him when he finally decided to will his herbarium to the Garden.

Judge Churchill often persuaded other botanists to accompany him in his travels, and always made new friends. His herbarium, growing thus during more than sixty years, became a veritable storehouse of pleasant reminiscences of people and places.

Farther west were journeys to Madison, Wisconsin, Sault Ste. Marie, to Colorado, and two memorable visits to the Yellowstone National Park, the latter in 1930. The venerable Judge with his official permit to collect specimens, frequently delayed the starting of the bus, as he enthusiastically lingered to seize some especially attractive plant. He steadfastly refused to visit California, on the ground that it was not wild enough for his purposes.

In Canada there were many trips to Lake Memphremagog in Quebec. Rivière du Loup, the Bonaventure River in Gaspé, Bic and Lac Tremblant, Cape Breton and Prince Edward Island were also visited and explored.





Upper: JUDGE CHURCHILL IN THE TYROL, 1913.  
Lower: JUDGE CHURCHILL ON NANTUCKET, 1916.



Two European journeys in 1907 and 1913 brought many botanical opportunities, with collecting in England, Wales, Germany, Italy, the Alps and the Dolomites. The Blumenthal above Mürren in Switzerland gave him the greatest bliss of all his many botanical experiences. The memory of that wonderful flowery vale was always associated in his mind with the much-loved Pastoral Symphony of Handel.

Judge Churchill enjoyed especially such field trips as were arranged by the Botanical Club from time to time, and seldom missed one of them. He did not look for easy assignments of territory on such occasions. At one time in his seventies he and the elderly R. W. Woodward of Connecticut chose to explore Breakneck Brook, as their share in the day's exploration, returning in fine condition with full boxes, to labor till late evening in getting the specimens into press. The Judge was a capital tramping companion. He was dignified and paternal in his bearing, but he was also vigorous, alert and persevering in the field. He had a quiet but by no means latent sense of humor. On one occasion, after walking along a mile or more of railway track with him, I reminded him of the Massachusetts statute by which vagrants against whom there is no other charge may be arrested for walking on the track. "Yes," said he, "that's the law, and I've often sent men up for breaking it. But I felt sorry for them. I like to walk on the railway track myself."

On one occasion a family that had been camping for some little time in Minot's Woods was brought into the Dorchester Court for vagrancy. "I suppose," said Judge Churchill, "that cases of this sort may be made of all of us who are addicted to camping in the summer. Of course we may not all be in such apparently straightened circumstances, or under such hard financial compulsion. But from the looks of the children they appear to be healthy, hearty and nice-looking children, who look as if they had enjoyed it. I therefore find the defendants not guilty."

In 1929 the Judge was criticised by a public official for his disposal of a drunken driver case. When the Judge was interviewed by the reporter, he said "The man is now in durance vile. We have got him off the roads. He is in jail, and I believe that the safety of the general public has been very well taken care of. What difference does it make whether he was sentenced to jail on the drunken driving complaint, or on any other complaint? He is in jail anyway."



The Judge used white labels for plants in the Gray's Manual area and the South, yellow labels for plants from beyond the Mississippi and blue labels for European specimens. He collected one or more duplicates of each plant when possible, and was very generous with them. He always saved one duplicate for his lifelong friend, Walter Deane. Thus, though his personal herbarium was bequeathed to the Missouri Botanical Garden, there are specimens of most of his important finds in the New England Botanical Club Herbarium or the Gray Herbarium. His plants are often cited by systematic botanists.

In 1887 he prepared a very accurate list of the plants growing in the town of Milton for inclusion in the town history. Later he made a careful study of *Leguminosae*, *Scrophulariaceae* and *Verbenaceae* as they occur in New England, and published checklists of them in RHODORA. He also wrote for RHODORA a most readable account of the excursion to Mt. Katahdin undertaken by five members of the Botanical Club in 1900. Other notes are scattered through the thirty-odd volumes of RHODORA. A most interesting article in September, 1921, tells of his discovery of *Cimicifuga racemosa* in Sheffield, Massachusetts, with a half-tone plate showing the good Judge in the midst of the vigorous plants, and quite dwarfed by the towering spikes around him. He later re-discovered a station for this plant in Bernardston, Massachusetts. In 1902 a strange *Scutellaria* which he had found at Ft. Fairfield, Maine, was named in his honor *Scutellaria Churchilliana* Fernald. By a clause in his will \$1000 from a trust fund will revert to RHODORA.

No account of our honored friend would be complete without reference to the music which meant so much to him. His mother (née Mary Buckminster Brewer) was most musical in her tastes, and he inherited his love through her. He had a fine tenor voice and belonged to the Cecilia Society and to the Handel and Haydn Society. He was a regular attendant at the Boston Symphony Concerts. He also became much interested in the Boston Music School Settlement, and often attended its concerts, which he greatly enjoyed. By the terms of his will a considerable share of a trust fund will revert to this Settlement.

Judge Churchill early learned to play the flute, and was often accompanied on the piano by Mrs. Churchill's sisters next door, Misses Susan and Annie D. Cushing. The marriage of Miss Annie D. Cushing to Dr. Edward D. Peters, an accomplished 'cellist, brought